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ABSTRACT

The portfolio assessment process at Thomas A. Edison State College is described in this report. Through portfolio assessment, the school helps students identify and gain credit for college-level skills and knowledge acquired through work, volunteer activities, independent reading, military or corporate training, and life experiences that may be hard to demonstrate by traditional methods. Students earn college credits by proving what they know, regardless of how they learned it. They put together a portfolio of documents, paperwork, and evidence that verifies college-level knowledge. Portfolio advisors help students review rough drafts of material, identify the best documentation, verify learning, and make relevant decisions about their portfolios. Documentation can include such things as computer programs, poems, artwork, tapes, and letters from employers. The entire assessment process may take from a month to a year, and students may begin working on the portfolios at any time during the year. If the student has a great deal of knowledge in a particular field but no documentation to prove it, it is possible to opt for an exam. A portfolio includes the course description, narrative, and evidence. A qualified faculty assessor reviews the portfolio and makes recommendations either to award or deny credit or requests additional information or testing. About 90% of all credits requested through this program are awarded. (Author/SM)

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PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT
OFFICE OF PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT
THOMAS A. EDISON STATE COLLEGE

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February 1989

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

Through the portfolio assessment process, Edison helps students identify and gain credit for college-level skills and knowledge acquired through work, volunteer activities, independent reading, military or corporate training, and other life experiences that may be difficult to demonstrate by more traditional methods. First, Edison's advisors help students match their knowledge to academic subjects that fit into Edison's degree programs. Students then develop portfolios that document their college-level knowledge, no matter how it was learned. Faculty consultants who teach college courses in those disciplines evaluate the portfolios for credit.

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PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Thomas A. Edison State College encourages students to earn college credits by demonstrating what they already know, regardless of how or where they learned it. They can do this through the Portfolio Assessment program, a flexible way of gaining credit for one's knowledge and expertise. Like any method of earning credits, portfolio assessment takes time and effort. But it offers the flexibility of working at one's own pace and convenience. Moreover, the portfolio process may begin at any time -- even in the middle of a semester.

To earn credits by assessment, one must be able to prove to a qualified faculty member that one has already learned the subject matter covered by a particular course. The best way to do this is by putting together a portfolio of documents, paperwork and other evidence that verifies college-level knowledge.

Portfolio Assessment provides the most flexible option for earning college credit. Through this process the skills and knowledge students have acquired from their work experience, volunteer activities, homemaking abilities, independent reading, military experience and special accomplishments can very often be translated into college credit. Although the term portfolio assessment suggests that what is assessed is a student's portfolio, in fact it is a student's knowledge and skills which are assessed. The portfolio is simply the vehicle for demonstrating what each student knows.

The portfolio development process requires students to identify their knowledge and skills. Busy adults often do not have an opportunity to consider all they have learned and can do. This early step in the portfolio assessment process often provides new insight into the richness and diversity of each individual's life.

Having identified their knowledge and skills acquired outside the college classroom, students can then carefully select the courses for which they need to earn credit. Assessment of prior learning can help students expedite their educational goals -- whether these be degrees, certificates or job promotions. The portfolio assessment process requires students to choose particular college course descriptions that best match their own learning.

Portfolio advisors help students review rough drafts of material, identify the best documentation, verify learning, and make several decisions relevant to the construction of their portfolios.

Documentation included in a portfolio can include anything that verifies a student's knowledge — computer programs, poems, artwork, audio or video tapes, clothing designs, letters from employers, articles about a student's accomplishments -- the list is virtually limitless.

The entire portfolio assessment process may take anywhere between one month to a year. The time depends on the content areas and the number of credits that are to be assessed. Students may begin working on their portfolios at any time during the year. There is no need to begin and finish on a semester basis.

At Edison State College no limit is placed on the number of credits that may be earned through the portfolio assessment process. The actual number will depend largely on the depth and breadth of students' knowledge as well as the extent to which this learning is appropriate to students' degree programs. Students working on a portfolio in conjunction with degree programs at institutions other than Edison State College will most likely find that their institutions limit the number of credits that can be earned in this fashion. They will want to check with their home institutions before applying for portfolio assessment.

The topics of human knowledge are virtually limitless. It is important for students to remember that the College can only assess courses that are taught at accredited U.S. colleges and for which faculty assessors can be found.

Sometimes students have a great deal of knowledge in a particular field but no evidence or documentation to prove it. In these cases students can opt for an examination as part of the assessment process. This method works extremely well for many students who would otherwise be unable to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Sometimes faculty assessors also choose to administer examinations when students have submitted evidence. This is the faculty member's prerogative and should be regarded as a normal academic procedure.

Students using many different catalogs to select their course titles will want to be on the alert for duplication of credit problems. Sometimes courses with different course titles cover the same content. In any academic setting students may not earn college credit for the same course. Again, portfolio assessment students need to work closely with their advisors to avoid this problem early on in the process.

A portfolio includes three parts: (1) the course description, (2) the narrative, (3) the evidence.

Course descriptions are an important component of the portfolio process. Faculty advisors rely on the course description students provide to evaluate college-level knowledge. They expect to see the entire content of the course description addressed in the portfolio. One should select a course description that accurately matches one's knowledge. The description may be selected from any regionally accredited college or university.

In general, the narrative for each course is three to four pages long and includes a discussion of one's knowledge as it specifically relates to the selected course description. In addition, the narrative should refer to the specific evidence provided. The narrative serves as a link between the course description and evidence. For courses that are theoretically-based (almost all liberal arts courses) the narrative needs to be longer since students must fully discuss their understanding of the theory as it relates to what they do. It is not unusual to cite specific theories and publications and discuss these in the narrative.

The narrative should fully describe <u>any</u> training received which relates to the course in question. This training may have been of a formal classroom variety, corporate in-house training, military school, apprenticeship, one-on-one training from a supervisor, training obtained while studying for any type of licensure or certification, personal study or readings, or any other experience that may have been important in terms of the subject matter in the course in question. The student describes in detail the nature of the training mentioned in terms of duration, methods used (classroom, one-on-one, etc.), texts or manuals used, whether assignments were given (reading, problems, etc.), how evaluated (tests, assignments, class participation, term paper, etc.).

The narrative should also describe any work experience that the student has had which relates to the topics in the course description. One must indicate the companies for which one worked, years worked, and position(s) held, fully describing one's functions and responsibilities. The student will refer to specific items of evidence and supportive documentation.

The evidence section of the portfolio pertains specifically to the course under assessment and should provide comprehensive documentation of knowledge. It should be set up to parallel the narrative and should present evidence to verify all statements made.

Once the portfolio has been accepted by the College, it is sent to a qualified faculty assessor who has taught a comparable subject at a college or university and who has been specially trained to assess prior learning. This person reviews the portfolio and makes one of three recommendations: to award credit, deny credit, or request additional information or testing of the student.

Approximately 90% of all credits requested through the portfolio assessment process are eventually awarded. This is about the same rate of achievement as in a traditional college classroom.

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